Origins of the Dope Mnemonic

Scott Weingart, MD FCCM

All the way back in episode 16, I asked if anyone knew the origins of the DOPE mnemonic for post-intubation desaturation. Nobody had an answer until now. Here is an email from Ahad…

> Hi there Dr.Scott.
>
> I'm Ahad (pronounced as "AA" like when the doc wants to examine your throat then followed by "had") an emergency medicine resident and junior educator for King Saud University at King Khalid University Hospital from Saudi Arabia.
>
> I wanted to tell you the whole story about the mnemonic "DOPE". It was initially used by plumbers and oil workers in the 1950s. They used a substance which was a chemical sealant called "pipe dope" to seal pipes. They used to check the integrity of the pipes by saying "Don't forget DOPE" and also to remind them to apply it in the first place.
>
> How they used the mnemonic is very similar to how doctors use it…
>
> D=displacement of the pipes that are joined
>
> O=obstruction within the pipes tested due to the substance clogging the inside of the pipe
>
> P=pneumatic pump to test for air leaks
>
> E=equipment failure in testing e.g hydraulics…etc
>
> One day there was a plumbing problem and a leak was found in one of the ORs the plumbers were there and one shouted "Don't forget DOPE" while explaining what to do to the other plumber… This incident occurred right in front of Dr.John Joseph Bonica (Wrestling Champ 1941 and Anesthesiologist) and a couple of his residents/medical students (not sure) while he was explaining checking anesthesia equipments… he laughed and said "Don't forget DOPE".
>
> At that time it wasn't linked with endotrachial intubation! One of his student/residents linked it later on. That doctor was Prof. Thomas Michals who mentioned this story to the professor who told me this story Prof.Edward Luther Strivani ….
>
> Hope that helped… By the way it was officially mentioned in the ATLS book in the 7th ed only…
>
> Regards,
>
> Ahad

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